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**Efforts of Cultural Preservation by Indigenous
Communities in Taiwan: A Case Study of Amis, Bunun
and Yami Groups**

BACHELOR THESIS

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Bachelor thesis subject – indigenous communities in Taiwan (specifically Amis, Bunun and Yami indigenous groups) and their cultural preservation efforts from the 20th century to the present day.

The aim of the bachelor thesis – to examine how local indigenous groups (using Amis, Bunun and Yami examples) try to preserve their cultural heritage in the Han-based Taiwanese population and how the policies towards indigenous peoples' rights, lands and cultural heritage have changed over time from the 20th century to the present day.

The objectives of the thesis: **1)** examine the historical and land disputes experienced by Taiwanese indigenous people throughout the Japanese colonial period in the 20th century, the following governance under Kuomintang (KMT) rule, and the latest government policies under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP); **2)** to provide a comprehensive analysis of how indigenous people adapt to the Han-based Taiwanese population and the challenges they encounter; **3)** identify the cultural characteristics that distinguish Amis, Bunun and Yami indigenous groups, along with their cultural preservation strategies; **4)** compare Amis, Bunun, and Yami groups in regards to their efforts to preserve culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are 16 officially recognized indigenous groups in Taiwan, collectively referred to as *Yuanzhuminzu* 原住民族 and belonging to the Austronesian linguistic group. Taiwan has been their homeland for a long time until the Dutch colonization began, which dates back to the 17th century. Since then, Taiwan has undergone various colonizations by different political regimes, including Japanese and Chinese, with the latter successfully establishing lasting governance over the island from the 1945. With the presence of colonizers, Taiwanese indigenous people encountered new dangers of failing to protect their cultural heritage and land. Being suppressed by colonial rule, indigenous people had to adapt to being the minority in a newly constructed population, which was overtaken by the Han-based majority. And yet, at the end of the 20th century, Taiwan experienced a new shift in its policy towards indigenous people, from turning a blind eye to addressing the issues and solving the long-lasting problem of how to revive indigenous people's cultural heritage. In a way, this matter became relevant in the 21st century as Taiwan attempted to further construct a new version of the Taiwanese identity, amidst a significant political battle with neighboring China. Therefore, the Taiwanese government tries to reshape the narrative of once marginalized indigenous people and to present Taiwan as a strong nation with its rich cultural and ethnic diversity.

The main **subject** of this thesis is indigenous communities in Taiwan (with case studies of Amis, Bunun, and Yami indigenous groups) and their efforts of cultural preservation from the 20th century to the present day.

This thesis paper attempts to answer the **question** of how indigenous communities in Taiwan managed to protect their neglected and marginalized cultural heritage during the 20th century colonial period and up until now with the Han-based majority, providing insight under different governments' policies.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to examine how local indigenous groups (namely, Amis, Bunun, and Yami) try to preserve their cultural heritage in the Han-based Taiwanese population and how policies towards indigenous people's rights, lands, and cultural heritage have changed over time from the 20th century to the present day.

The objectives of this work:

1. Examine the historical and land disputes experienced by Taiwanese indigenous people throughout the Japanese colonial period in the 20th century, the following governance under Kuomintang (KMT) rule, and the latest government policies under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).
2. Provide a comprehensive analysis of how indigenous people adapt to the Han-based Taiwanese population and the challenges they encounter;

3. Identify the cultural characteristics that distinguish Amis, Bunun, and Yami indigenous groups, along with their cultural preservation strategies;
4. Compare Amis, Bunun, and Yami groups in regards to their efforts to preserve culture.

Several methods were used to conduct a thorough study for this bachelor thesis. These methods include analyzing indigenous groups by gathering information from the *scientific literature*; as well as providing a *comparative analysis*. This paper will present a comparative analysis of 3 indigenous groups (Amis, Bunun, Yami), by comparing their origin, cultural aspects, situation during the colonial times, main ceremonies, working industries, and more. Apart from the previously mentioned methods, this paper will also use *primary sources*. It will include a 2016 speech by former president Tsai Ing-wen, in which she apologizes to Taiwanese indigenous people for the neglect of their rights throughout history. Her speech will be analyzed by watching a video, and providing key points of this paper.

The review of an academic and other sources. Chun Shih-yu's work, 'Representing Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan: The Role of Museums,' served as the main source for examining the historical trajectory of Japanese colonialism, KMT, and DPP rule in Taiwan. It reveals how each government treated indigenous communities, leading to land disputes, assimilation processes, cultural erosion, and attempts to repair the damage. Chang Bi-yu's "From Taiwanization to de-Sinification" concentrates on the political situation in Taiwan (by comparing KMT and DPP rules), highlighting legal changes and emerging institutions concerning indigenous people. Huang Chia-yuan's book "Taiwan's Contemporary Indigenous Peoples" addresses cultural heritage preservation strategies in fields such as art, literature, films, politics, and tourism. It offers fresh ideas and insights into indigenous people's efforts to reclaim their heritage. For a detailed examination of Amis, Bunun and Yami groups, this paper uses information from the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP, hereafter), including statistics and group characteristics. CIP, together with Huang Chia-yuan's "Taiwan's Contemporary Indigenous Peoples" is used to determine differences between Mountain and Plain indigenous groups.

The **structure of this bachelor thesis** consists of an introduction; the main part (body) with 3 chapters, each containing 3-4 sections; conclusions; references; summary.

In the first chapter, the main focus will be on the historical context, aiming to reveal the overall situation and to clarify the causes of conflict between Taiwanese indigenous people and new settlers. This chapter examines the changes within indigenous people's lives and how they affected their customs, relationships, and rights over lands. This chapter will also discuss the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) work towards reclaiming indigenous people's rights and acts to revive their cultural significance.

The second chapter will concentrate on indigenous population and answer how colonization affected Mountain (*shandi yuanzhumin* 山地原住民) and Plain (*Pingdi Yuanzhumin* 平地原住民) indigenous people in the contemporary world, as well as what policies did the government establish to revitalize the cultural heritage. Additionally, this chapter will describe biggest challenges in the 21st century.

The third chapter will analyze the cultural characteristics and preservation strategies of the Amis, Bunun, and Yami groups. It will examine and compare these three groups, exploring their distinctive customs and how they utilize these features to promote their culture in the contemporary world.

This paper could be useful to individuals interested in Taiwanese indigenous history, ethnic diversity, and cultural heritage. It will also benefit those seeking to understand the role of indigenous peoples in shaping the new Taiwanese identity.

1. Indigenous People Under Different Political Regimes: Historical Perspective

Taiwanese indigenous people belong to the Austronesian ethnic group and have been the primary inhabitants of Taiwan for over 6,500 years (Chen 2017, 77). Some studies suggest that Taiwan might be a homeland for Austronesian-speaking people, who have now spread all over Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Madagascar. This theory comes from the fact that there are many different indigenous languages found in Taiwan (Huang 2016, 295). Taiwan is a relatively small island with a size of 36,197 square kilometers, yet there are 16¹ officially recognized indigenous groups, each having a distinct language, cultural characteristics, and customs. Just from the 2019 statistics, approximately 595,300 indigenous people lived in Taiwan, making 2.5% of the total population of the island (CIP).

From the historical perspective, Taiwan has always been a subject to multiple colonizations: starting with the Dutch settlers in 1624, then switching the power to the Qing Dynasty, and later finishing with the Japanese and the Nationalist Party of China. Beginning with the Dutch settlers, who mainly were merchants, they used Taiwanese lands for trade, often recruiting Han-Chinese instead of indigenous people, therefore, causing minor conflicts between the two sides (Chen 2017, 82). Yet, Dutch arrival in Taiwan had little impact to indigenous communities compared to later colonizers.

¹ Before the 21st century, there were only 9 officially recognized indigenous groups in Taiwan, but by 2014, this number increased to 16 (Huang 2016, 309). Officially recognized groups are: Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Puyuma, Rukai, Tsou, Saisiyat, Yami (Tao), Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Seediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu.

Dutch colonization was replaced in 1662 by Ming loyalist Koxinga (鄭成功 *Zheng Chenggong*), who ruled Taiwan briefly until Taiwan was incorporated into the Qing Dynasty's Fujian province (Yang 2001, 36). This caused a massive arrival of Han Chinese settlers, resulting in demographic changes that made indigenous people feel threatened. Some indigenous groups felt a stronger presence of Han Chinese, with their homes being taken away and their hunting grounds being converted into agricultural lands, most of which were wet rice fields (Yang 2001, 37).

Soon, the Han Chinese gave new names to indigenous people. They created two categories: those who were willing to adopt Chinese cultural practices, were labeled as Cooked Barbarians (熟番 *shu fan*); meanwhile, those who were harder to change and were “uncivilized”, were labeled as Raw Barbarians (生番 *sheng fan*) (Huang 2016, 296-297). Usually Mountain indigenous people (*Shandi yuanzhumin* 山地原住民) belonged to the latter category due to their rural location and limited interactions with new settlers. Meanwhile, Plain indigenous people (*Pingdi Yuanzhumin* 平地原住民) had more interactions with new settlers because they used to reside in lowland, more urban areas.

1.1 Japanese Colonial Period

On April 17, 1895, the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed, ceding Taiwan to Japan and ending the Qing Dynasty's control after 212 years (Barclay 2018, 28). While the Qing government recognized some indigenous autonomy, the Japanese, on the other hand, took a more aggressive approach. They arrived in Taiwan with a clear objective: to expand their influence and exploit the territory. The political system was characterized as “extremely repressive and designed to serve Japanese interests first” (Myers 1973, 425). Initially, Japanese perceptions of Taiwanese indigenous people were derogatory, depicting them as savage and uncivilized. For instance, in 1902, Mochiji Rokusaburo, a councillor of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, published a famous paper, where he described Taiwanese indigenous people as: “<...> sociologically speaking, they are indeed human beings but looked at from the viewpoint of international law, they resemble animals” (Barclay 2018, 28). This negative view arose mainly from practices like head-hunting, common among indigenous groups except for Yami on Orchid Island (Huang et al. 2021, 20).

The Japanese thought that Taiwanese indigenous people were savages, thus possessing no real threat to the Japanese superior military army. However, they underestimated indigenous people's resilience and deep knowledge of their lands, especially the parts of Taiwan that are covered in mountains. Therefore, at the beginning of the Japanese colonial period, even with a military advantage, the new settlers encountered a daunting resistance, suffering greater costs than anticipated.

Despite the challenges at the beginning, the Japanese persisted with further strategies to make Taiwan their successful colony. They realized that they knew little about indigenous communities in Taiwan, hence they decided to gather more information. By doing so, they categorized indigenous people into 8 groups based on physical features, cultural attributes, level of civilization, language, and oral traditions (Chen 2017, 90). The 8 groups consisted of Atayal, Bunun, Saisiyat, Tsou, Paiwan, Puyuma, Amis, and Rukai tribes. It had helped the Japanese to identify which groups would be easier targets of assimilation, and which would require greater surveillance and military suppression.

Compared to the Japanese and Han Chinese, the indigenous people held the most disadvantageous position in society. Their traditions and rights were marginalized and replaced with Japanese customs and etiquette, leading to the decline of indigenous cultural heritage. Eventually, it sparked a few disputes, such as the Wushe Rebellion in 1930, led by the Seediq tribe in the central mountains (Barclay 2018, 43). To prevent the indigenous people from organizing “unpredictable” revolts, the Japanese tried to relocate highland indigenous groups to lower areas. As a result, between 1903 and 1941, around 43,000 indigenous people were forced to leave their homes and resettle (Huang 2016, 297). The Japanese also established police stations for surveillance. It allowed them to monitor every suspicious act and tighten their control over Taiwan.

Taiwanese indigenous people used to practice slash-and-burn agriculture², which allowed them to grow local crops, such as millet, taro, and sweet potato. However, after the Japanese took over Taiwan, this practice was abolished, resulting in significant ecological and forest biodiversity changes (Yang 2001, 39). Moreover, it disturbed the indigenous way of living. For example, millet was eventually substituted with rice, although it has always held symbolic meaning in indigenous culture because it was “strongly associated with cosmological worldviews and ritual obligations” (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 119). This transformation represented a huge sacrifice for the indigenous people, who could no longer follow the ancestral way of living.

The Japanese implemented assimilation policies in all sectors, including Taiwan’s education system. The education system was created to align with Japanese teachings and to promote Japanization. Therefore, indigenous children had to undergo Japanese-style education, learning the Japanese language, history, customs; while completely neglecting their indigenous studies. The Japanese had to show that they were superior in every aspect, thus bullying and harsh discipline towards indigenous children were common. The education system aimed to erode indigenous cultural identity, and to break their inner resistance (Chen 2017, 91).

² A farming method that requires people to burn forested areas and then use the ashes to fertilize the soil.

1.2 Indigenous Uprisings Against Japanese Colonial Rule

Considering how marginalized indigenous people were, it was a matter of time before the tension between the two sides would escalate. For safety measures, the Japanese confiscated firearms used for traditional indigenous hunting (Huang 2016, 298). It added more resentment from indigenous communities. Hence, not long after the beginning of the Japanese colonial period, indigenous people organized the first armed resistance against the colonizers, also known as the Beipu Uprising³ (Yang 2007).

A few local uprisings against the Japanese emerged throughout the whole colonial period, yet the bloodiest and most infamous began on October 27, 1930. The uprising was named as a Wushe Rebellion (霧社事件 *Wushe Shijian*), which was led by Mona Rudao. Together with around 300 indigenous men from the Seediq tribe⁴, Mona Rudao launched an attack to protest against the disrespectful treatment that indigenous people had to endure by the Japanese. The resentment towards colonizers was high, and on October 27, 1930, the Seediq people finally turned their grievances into a gruesome bloodbath. Their target was police units and a school assembly. In total, Seediq warriors managed to kill 134 individuals, including women and children (Barclay 2018, 1). A clear message was sent to the Japanese, indicating that they had failed to suppress the indigenous spirit. Meanwhile, Mona Rudao became an anti-colonial hero, whose firm leadership was praised later by other indigenous people, as well as inspired filmmakers to recreate Wushe Rebellion scenes on screen.

The Wushe Rebellion was the first major strike to the Japanese military power, yet it followed a counter-attack. Soon after the uprising, the Japanese sent 1194 soldiers and 1306 police personnel to suppress rebels (Huang 2016, 298). Although having better military equipment and a bigger army, the Japanese could not enjoy an easy victory. They even had to recruit the Truku tribe⁵, who historically always had ongoing conflicts with the Seediq tribe (same, 298). It took time and effort to break the Seediq warrior spirit, and the victory was not celebrated until the Japanese sent aircraft to drop mustard gas bombs into the forests (Barclay 2018, 113). This decision killed more than 600 indigenous people, while the rest decided to commit suicide to avoid capture. It brought an end to the Wushe Rebellion. Although the Seediq warriors experienced a total failure in winning, they made this rebellion a powerful symbol of indigenous resistance.

³ In 1907, Hakka people and the Saisiyat indigenous group joined forces to stand against the Japanese. In two days they managed to kill 57 Japanese officers and their family members. Later, the Japanese sent a counterattack, which caused over 100 fatalities.

⁴ At that time Seediq tribe belonged to the bigger Atayal tribe.

⁵ At that time Truku tribe belonged to the Atayal tribe.

1.3 Indigenous People Under the Kuomintang (KMT) Rule

In 1945, the Kuomintang⁶ (KMT, hereafter) moved to Taiwan and took over control from the Japanese. As the KMT took over the island, it enforced martial law, which implemented restrictions that prohibited indigenous people from embracing their cultural heritage. Taiwan was seen as a temporary stop for the KMT, therefore, in the meantime, the government tried to apply various sinification policies and take advantage of the island.

Following the KMT's sinification policies, Taiwanese indigenous people also experienced changes. Firstly, the KMT established Chinese as the official language in Taiwan. They prohibited local dialects in schools and public spaces, as well as excluded indigenous cultural aspects from school textbooks, by leaving an emphasis only on Chinese culture and history. If the Japanese gave more freedom to indigenous communities living high in the mountains, then the KMT persisted in "making the mountains like the plains" (Chen 2017, 97). As a result, several indigenous languages gradually became extinct. Apart from language and cultural restrictions, indigenous people also suffered from unequal treatment in land distribution. The KMT's privatization policies required long land registration processes that could take up to 10 years (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 153).

However, over time the KMT had to shift its mindset due to ongoing political reforms in China, particularly the Cultural Revolution. In 1981, the KMT established the Council of Cultural Affairs (CCA, hereafter), which was in charge of Taiwan's cultural development. For the first time, Taiwan had an institution which recognized indigenous cultural heritage (Chang 2004, 2). The CCA set a framework for acknowledging Taiwan's diverse cultural legacy. Meanwhile, in 1984, the KMT government further expanded indigenous institutions by establishing the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA, hereafter), which focused on issues mostly related to indigenous communities. ATA raised awareness about the indigenous economic hardships, educational rights, and land disputes (Chen 2017, 97). Additionally, ATA brought up issues such as naming problem (as indigenous Taiwanese people would write their names in Romanization rather than Chinese characters), prostitution, forced labor, and others. ATA served as an institution that unified the voices of indigenous people. It started a long process of de-sinification, something that eventually changed the whole perception, including those of the KMT.

The 1980s was a shifting time in Taiwan. The indigenous movements contributed to the reconstruction of Taiwan's self-identity. It was evident that indigenous people identified themselves as Taiwanese. However, Han people, who had migrated from China centuries ago, experienced an identity crisis. As well as the KMT with newly migrated Han people, who had nowhere else to go. With the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan experienced a process of democratization and

⁶ Nationalist Party of the Republic of China (ROC).

indigenization, transitioning the mindset from traditional Chinese to contemporary Taiwanese (Chang 2004, 3). The government abolished all negative, derogatory terms for the indigenous people, such as barbarians, implementing the only appropriate term *yuanzhuminzu* (原住民族), which means that the indigenous people were the first inhabitants of the island (Chen 2017, 98).

Following this, ATA announced the “Declaration of the Rights of Taiwan Aborigines (臺灣原住民族權利宣言 *taiwan yuanzhuminzu quanli xuanyan*) in 1987, where it expressed the rights in seventeen sections: “<...> entitlements to all human rights; rights to basic livelihood, self-governance, cultural identity; rights to regional autonomy; rights to land, ocean, natural resources; rights to use indigenous languages and traditional names” (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 205). It was a manifestation of regaining the basic indigenous rights that were taken during centuries of colonization, emphasizing cultural and land rights. Speaking of the latter, ATA launched various movements and protests, among which the “Return my Land” movement got the most recognition and support. It gathered over two thousand indigenous people to protest on the street (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 206). As it seemed not enough, in 1989 Taiwan witnessed a second wave of land rights movement, characterized by slogans like “Land is Life” and “Land is Mother” (same, 206). It was obvious that indigenous people would not stop fighting for the territory that traditionally belonged to them. To show their commitment to this issue, indigenous people organized the third wave of “Return my Land” movement and issued a 4000-word declaration defending their land rights (same, 206). However, regardless of indigenous attempts, it took decades for the government to finally respond to these land issues.

However, from the brighter perspective, various social indigenous movements in the 1980s and 1990s allowed them to achieve success in other fields: they could correct their names by using Romanization; the government established Council of Indigenous Peoples⁷ (CIP, hereafter), constitutional reforms were made in favor of indigenous communities (1997), and so on (Huang et al. 2021, 9). From the 1990s, Taiwan witnessed the rise of pro-independence and pro-democracy movements. One key activist was a political figure, Lee Teng-hui (李登輝 *Li DengHui*), better known in Taiwan as Mr. Democracy. He publicly advocated Taiwanisation and was recognized as the president who executed Taiwan’s transition to democracy. Even after his presidential term, he persisted in his efforts to unify people in Taiwan, referring to them as a “community of shared fate” (Chang 2004, 3). In other words, he sent the message that regardless of one’s ethnicity, whether Han or indigenous, anyone residing in Taiwan and considering it their home is regarded as Taiwanese.

Therefore, from the 1990s, the KMT started to distance themselves from a China-centric identity, finding new methods how to navigate the governance in a more subtle, less radical way. For

⁷ Council of Aboriginal Affairs (1996) was later renamed to Council of Indigenous Peoples (2002)

indigenous communities, it meant more attention spared on local cultures and traditions, embracing rather than neglecting them.

1.4 Indigenous People Under the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) Rule

With the beginning of the 21st century, new waves of power emerged in Taiwan. The island became a place where democratization and Taiwanization were promoted among the society. In political world, however, this liberalization caused the downfall of the KMT. Ironically, the KMT itself promoted democratization, yet its China-centric past sabotaged the following elections. As a substitute to the KMT, a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, hereafter) emerged, which promoted Taiwanization throughout the whole party's existence. Consequently, DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁 *Chen ShuiBian*) was the first from the DPP who won the Presidential election in 2000, defeating the long-ruling KMT party (Huang et al. 2021, 108).

Indigenization became "DPP's top priority" (Chang 2004, 4). The party wanted to harmonize the relationship between the Han and indigenous people by promising that it would respect "<...> the indigenous peoples' natural rights to their traditional homelands, <...> grant the recovery of these traditional homelands" (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 207). As a result, the government increased the funding for research on indigenous community mapping. The DPP also focused on indigenous institutions, such as CIP, providing them with more autonomy to promote, educate, and advocate indigenous communities around Taiwan. For the first time, during the DPP's governance, indigenous singers were invited to perform in their traditional clothes the national anthem during Taiwan's National Day in 2000, and then the New Year's flag-raising ceremony in 2002 (Chen 2017, 100). In other words, the DPP wanted to demonstrate Taiwan as a culturally rich and diverse place, where different ethnic groups are regarded as equally important parts of the society.

Comparing the two parties (KMT and DPP), one can say that the KMT holds more conservative, China-centric ideas, whereas the DPP wants to change the narrative of Taiwan and promote a liberal, independent state of the island. The DPP also focuses more on indigenous people than the KMT, by providing more policies and rights to boost indigenous cultural heritage. The following chapters will explore further the changes in the lives of indigenous people from the 21st century.

2. Indigenous People in Han-based Taiwanese Society

Of all the 16 officially recognized indigenous groups, almost all of them are regarded as Mountain people, except for the Kavalan and Sakizaya tribes (Chen 2022). The majority of other

indigenous tribes living in lowland regions are not officially recognized, although in recent years there has been an active search for ways to gain official acknowledgment from the CIP. The Makatao, Siraya, Taivoan, and many other tribes (10 in total), considered Plain indigenous people, identify themselves as part of the indigenous community. However, they have yet to obtain official recognition. Recognizing their identity is complicated because of intermarriages with Han Taiwanese, adoptions of urban lifestyles, and the losses of ancestral traditions, making validation difficult (Chen 2017, 81).

Now, why are some indigenous tribes finding it important to be formally recognized? First and foremost, official recognition gives official rights and basic protection by law. The 16 indigenous groups officially recognized by the government are protected by laws that offer them protection and special privileges, particularly in areas like education. It is also important for indigenous people to have a voice and someone who can represent each tribe's needs. Thus, those groups that are formally recognized can enjoy representation across all levels of government, starting from parliament, city and country councillors, CIP, and some local townships representing positions (Adawai 2022). The remaining unrecognized 10 tribes, comprising over 9,000 individuals, are unable to receive that support from the government and represent themselves as a legally formed indigenous entities.

2.1 Indigenous Population and Education System

In recent decades, Taiwanese indigenous people experienced a steady growth in their population. According to 2024 statistics, the total number of indigenous people consisted of 595,300 individuals, 28,03% higher compared to the results from 2005 (464,961 individuals). Such a rise could be explained through new policies that were implemented in the 21st century.

Under Taiwan's law, "<...> children born with mixed indigenous/Han parents may choose their own official designation" (Chen 2017, 101). More young people from mixed families choose their indigenous identity over Han. Some choose it because they feel more confident to embrace indigenous identity. Others choose their indigenous identity due to additional benefits from the government. For example, belonging to the indigenous group means that a person can receive bonus points for school and university entrance exams, get subsidies for pre-school educational expenses, and more (same, 101).

Speaking of the education system in Taiwan, the government tries to provide more opportunities for the indigenous youth, so that the disparity between indigenous and Han Taiwanese would not be too high. According to the Ministry of Education, "Educational institutions at or above senior secondary level shall ensure that indigenous students have opportunities to enroll and study there and when necessary may provide above-quota places as a measure to ensure this. Government

Scholarships for Overseas Studies shall also reserve a number of scholarships for indigenous students to ensure that outstanding indigenous people have opportunities to nurture and develop their skills and potential.”⁸ Therefore, the government tries to encourage diligent indigenous people to pursue higher studies, so they could find better employment opportunities in the future.

However, more than half of the indigenous youth does not pursue higher education. The reason for that may stem from problems within the education system itself or struggles related to identity crisis. The discrimination and marginalization throughout Taiwan’s colonial history had deeply affected indigenous communities and nearly broke their cultural identity. Therefore, the indigenous youth struggles with “developing a deep core of inner self” (Nesterova 2023, 324). It is important to point out, that although Taiwan’s government tries to integrate indigenous students in the academic world, yet the school curriculum mainly aims to serve the Han-based society. Usually, there is a huge problem with finding suitable teachers, since the majority work in urban cities. There are also more Han teachers than indigenous ones. They lack basic knowledge and experience regarding how to effectively engage with culturally different children (Nesterova 2023, 320). Meanwhile, students can feel this lack of understanding. They find themselves trapped in their unfortunate situation, leading to a decline in motivation to pursue higher studies.

2.2 Challenges Encountered by Indigenous Communities

Due to historical colonization and marginalization policies, Taiwanese indigenous people had to go through many challenges, such as identity loss, land disputes, assimilation, and socio-economic disparities. Although the 21st century allowed them to seek cultural revitalization, those long-standing issues did not fade away overnight, with some still persisting until now.

For example, the income gap between indigenous people and Han Taiwanese remains huge, often reaching double or triple differences. In 2006 statistics, the annual income for an indigenous household reached 463,980 TWD, meanwhile the national average was 1,064,153 TWD (Huang 2016, 303). Therefore, indigenous people still receive work-related discrimination and inequality, which leads to rising numbers of unemployment and poverty (Huang et al. 2021, 129). Even those who end up finding a job, usually stick with low-skilled fields, such as construction sites, agriculture, tourism areas, tea plantations, fishing sectors, etc. Even as of 2014, the unemployment rate surpassed the national average; and nearly 60% were classified as falling below the national poverty line (Chen

⁸ 教育部, 原住民族教育法, 第 23 條: “高級中等以上學校, 應保障原住民學生入學及就學機會, 必要時, 得採額外保障辦理; 公費留學並應提供名額, 保障培育原住民之人才; 其辦法, 由中央教育主管機關定之。前項原住民公費留學保障名額之學門, 中央教育主管機關應會商中央原住民族主管機關定之。”

2017, 102). Is it important to mention, that the unemployment rates are even higher in rural, high mountain areas.

With such economic stagnation and high levels of unemployment, there is an increase in alcoholism, domestic abuse, health problems, and accidental deaths (Huang 2016, 303). Based on 2011 statistics, the indigenous life expectancy was 8.6 years shorter than that of the general population: 9.9 years less for men (66.1 versus 76) and 7.3 years less for women (75.3 versus 82.6) (Juan 2016). The most common health problems associated with indigenous death include malignant tumors, liver and heart diseases, diabetes, and tuberculosis (Huang et al. 2021, 28). Certain health issues come from diet and cultural practices and genetic predispositions (for instance, indigenous people may have a higher tendency to specific diseases, such as diabetes and heart problems). Yet, lower life expectancy is more related to socio-economic disadvantages, which are associated with poor living conditions and alcoholism, leading to higher numbers of homicides and vehicle accidents (Juan 2016).

2.3 President Tsai Ing-wen Speech (2016)

In 2016, Taiwan made history by electing its 7th president, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文 *Cai Yingwen*), who became the first female president to take office. During her first eight months in office, on August 1st (National Indigenous Day), she surprised many by initiating and broadcasting a formal apology speech to indigenous people (Chen 2017, 307). No previous Taiwanese president has ever undertaken such action, and it is this approach that sets Tsai Ing-wen apart from her predecessors. To make it look even more sincere, Tsai Ing-wen has invited representatives of each indigenous tribe to the Presidential Office to directly participate and express their voices during the ceremony. Already at the beginning of the ceremony, a representative from the Bunun tribe conducted a traditional prayer ritual, sprinkling drops of alcohol to ensure that ancestral spirits would acknowledge the president, which would lead to a successful and smooth ceremony (Tsai 2016).

President Tsai Ing-wen started her speech by saying: “To all indigenous peoples of Taiwan: On behalf of the government, I express to you our deepest apology. For the four centuries of pain and mistreatment you have endured, I apologize to you on behalf of the government.”⁹ In her speech, president Tsai Ing-wen brought up specific examples of mistreatment that previous governments had been reluctant to acknowledge. As stated in her speech, indigenous people were marginalized, assimilated, and humiliated by previous governments, which almost caused indigenous cultural

⁹ “我要代表政府，向全體原住民族，致上我們最深的歉意。對於過去四百年來，各位承受的苦痛和不公平待遇，我代表政府，向各位道歉。” (Tsai 2016)

erosion. Not only that, but governments also made some shameful decisions, such as creating an unauthorized storage of nuclear waste on the Orchid Island (home to Yami people), widening disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, establishing Han-dominant narrative in education, and so on (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 36).

Although the speech itself could not resolve all the problems and change past injustices, it was a symbolic step towards addressing the issues and making indigenous communities around Taiwan feel that their voices were heard. The speech was followed by president Tsai Ing-wen's promises: "<...> to retrieve historical memories, to promote indigenous self-government, to seek fair economic development, to ensure continuation of culture and education, to safeguard indigenous health, and to protect the rights of urban indigenous peoples, etc."¹⁰ Because it was only the 8th month of Tsai Ing-wen's presidential term, this speech also disclosed her clear stance on political matters and a higher focus on improving living conditions for indigenous people. Under her term, she has promised to, "<...> ensure that succeeding generations of Indigenous tribes and all ethnic peoples in Taiwan never lose their languages and memories, that they are never separated from their cultural traditions" (Huang et al. 2021, 105).

President Tsai Ing-wen highlighted the importance of not leaving indigenous people on the side, as it was done before, but rather embracing them as valued and equal citizens of Taiwan. Both Han Taiwanese and indigenous people are crucial in shaping Taiwan's identity. Therefore, indigenous people's perspectives must be taken into consideration, and their traditions must be preserved.

3. Indigenous Cultural Preservation: Amis, Bunun, Yami

Historically speaking, as this paper has already explained, Taiwanese indigenous people have been living under control for centuries, not being able to openly expose some of their traditions. It was not until the 1980s that the situation changed and Taiwan began to recognize and acknowledge the importance of indigenous culture as a key part of shaping national identity. Moreover, it was not until the late 20th century – early 21st century that the government reshaped its trajectory and finally started thinking of indigenous cultural recovery and revitalization.

In 2008, Ministry of Culture (MOC, hereafter) issued "Cultural Heritage Preservation Act", which: "<...> is enacted to preserve and enhance cultural heritage, ensure the universal and equal

¹⁰ “這些事務包括歷史記憶的追尋、原住民族自治的推動、經濟的公平發展、教育與文化的傳承、健康的保障，以及都市族人權益的維護等等。” (Tsai 2016)

right to participate in preserving cultural heritage,<...> and promote the cultural diversity.”¹¹ Although this decree was issued to highlight the importance of a general cultural heritage, it was mostly meant to preserve indigenous culture. To support this point, the document divides cultural heritage into two parts: tangible and intangible. While tangible cultural heritage covers the monuments, natural landscapes, historic buildings, etc., intangible cultural heritage mainly focuses on traditional performing arts, traditional craftsmanship, oral traditions and expressions, folklore, and traditional knowledge and practices¹². By using the words “traditional,” “folklore,” etc., this act already indicates that its subject is an indigenous community. MOC lists a few such examples: Atayal myths, Bunun music performances, Amis harvest ceremony, and Saisiyat ritual where they honor people who preceded them (Chen 2017, 117). Therefore, all these intangible subgroups place great importance on protecting traditional indigenous culture.

Originally, indigenous people lacked the tradition of documenting their culture through writing (Chen 2017, 51). Everything was done in oral form: singing, performing arts, using handicrafts, having ceremonies, sharing stories from mouth to mouth, and so on. It also explains why some indigenous languages did not survive the colonial period, simply because they were not written down. However, the oral type of cultural expression that survived is now being highly treasured. By revitalizing cultural heritage of indigenous people, Taiwan has introduced a new way to boost its economy and garner global attention. The answer to this particular initiative is cultural tourism and other approaches to gather people’s interest: indigenous cultural festivals, art performances, food, museums, cultural centers, or simply creating more opportunities for tourists to get familiar with indigenous villages and their daily lives (Yeh 2021, 2).

Firstly, cultural centers (also known as indigenous visitor centers) are a great way to spread awareness of indigenous cultural heritage. These centers gather neighboring indigenous communities, providing all the support needed to promote indigenous artists and encourage indigenous tourism (Chen 2017, 114). Apart from their diverse functions, indigenous visitor centers also include indigenous coffee shops, food stalls, workshop facilities, and more. It is a multi-functional space, where every aspect of indigenous culture is welcomed.

It was during the year 2007 and onward that many local centers were established (Chen 2017, 73). However, among the many indigenous visitor centers that were constructed, only a few managed to stay well preserved. Some of those centers got criticism from both indigenous communities and visitors for not being engaging enough, while other indigenous visitor centers were

¹¹ 文化部，文化資產保存法，第 1 條：“為保存及活用文化資產，保障文化資產保存普遍平等之參與權，充實國民精神生活，發揚多元文化，特制定本法。”

¹² 文化部，“文化資產保存法”

funded as part of the vote-buying campaign during elections and left unsupervised once the election ended, therefore lacking further funding (Huang et al. 2021, 110). As for 2019 statistics, Taiwan had 29 so-called small indigenous cultural centers (Huang et al. 2021, 11).

Speaking of museums, Taiwan has placed great importance on including indigenous art. Already in 2002, the CCA issued a project called “Local Cultural Museum Development,” which emphasized a crucial need to rewrite Taiwanese history and reshape its narrative with the help of indigenous people (Cheng 2017, 114). Therefore, both large and small museums, such as the National Taiwan Museum, National Palace Museum, Shung Ye Formosan Aborigines Museum, and others, feature artworks or even entire exhibitions dedicated to specific indigenous tribes. Some of them feature historical artifacts, traditional clothes, and rituals, while others advertise indigenous contemporary art.

The Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (KMFA, hereafter), stands out as the most notable institution for exhibiting indigenous art and is “<...> the only public art museum in Taiwan to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to Taiwan Indigenous art” (Huang et al. 2021, 116). Already from its opening in 1994, the KMFA was run by directors who advocated “native consciousness” and issued a dozen projects that “<...> demonstrate the uniqueness of Taiwan as the origin of Austronesian cultural lineage.” (KMFA)

Apart from museums and other institutions that are in charge of revitalizing indigenous culture, there are other way indigenous traditions and knowledge are addressed. One example contains traditional indigenous grain millet. As explained earlier in this paper, millet has always been a traditional and sacred staple food before it was replaced with rice. The tradition of growing millet went almost extinct, yet now there are various projects supporting millet restoration. For instance, National Dong Hwa University established Millet Farm in 2012, which was the first such farm in Taiwan to cultivate indigenous farming knowledge (Yeh 2021, 7). Through this project, students can experience traditional farming methods, delve deeper into indigenous agriculture, and share their acquired knowledge with others. It not only educates them about agriculture but also teaches about the whole circle of indigenous life, since millet has been used during major indigenous ceremonies and is considered an inseparable part of the indigenous community.

The majority of indigenous people migrate to bigger cities due to economic reasons; hence, not everyone is able to come back to their hometowns during important indigenous ceremonies. As a result, instead of not celebrating at all, they launch festivals in the cities where they reside (Huang 2016, 308). This method allows them to embrace their traditions regardless of location. That is how various indigenous people maintain contact with their tribes when they are away from their hometowns. They manage to create small communities, and for the sake of keeping traditions alive,

they often perform in various settings, hold ritual activities, recreate songs and dances, provide tribal language classes for anyone interested, share traditional skills, and more.

While some indigenous people try to revitalize their cultural heritage in cities, others tend to return to their hometowns. In 2014, some 64.6% of indigenous people living in cities, regardless of their economic satisfaction, wished to go back to their rural tribal communities at some point in the future (Huang 2016, 309). In practice, a few of these rural hometowns ended up very successful. As an example, a small Smangus community, belonging to the Atayal tribe, was once called “The Dark Tribe” due to the lack of electricity. Yet, the tribe’s leader, Presbyterian Pastor Icyeh, managed to convince the rest of the villagers to create a joined community, where everyone would be involved in work and share the profit (Huang 2016, 307). Through collective efforts, the community became closer and reinforced their bonds. Both the youth and elderly would receive training and end up working as tour guides or cultural mentors for tourists. It generated profit for the whole community, leading to the town’s expansion and prosperity.

Based on all these different examples, it is evident that Taiwanese indigenous people find ways to preserve their cultural heritage in the 21st century. It is a perfect time to pursue revitalization and show the beauty of a culture that has long been neglected and marginalized. Apart from indigenous efforts, the government also helps to establish museums, fund indigenous centers, and create conditions so that the cultural heritage of indigenous communities can flourish.

3.1 Cultural Characteristics: Amis Group

Amis is the largest indigenous group in Taiwan, located in the east of the Central Mountain Range (stretching from Hualien to Taitung). As of 2020, the total number of Amis people consisted of around 213,514 individuals (CIP). Due to their geographical location, Amis people are considered to be urban indigenous people and, therefore, heavily assimilated into the Han Taiwanese lifestyle. However, because of their high population, they managed to protect their culture from extinction. Being the biggest indigenous group in Taiwan, Amis is distributed into three major groups considering the location and differences in customs: northern Amis, central Amis, and southern Amis. For example, northern Amis believe that they originated from divine power (they are the descendants of deities), while southern Amis hold the belief that their ancestors came from a stone (CIP). There is also a huge difference in how Amis call themselves. The ones residing in the northern part are used to the term Amis, which means “northerners”, whereas the southern Amis tend to stick with the term Pangcah, which means “people” and “kinsmen” (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 32).

During the colonial period, Amis group had to undergo an assimilation process and was marginalized, just like the rest of the indigenous groups. Because they lived in less rural mountainous

areas, Amis had more frequent interactions with new settlers. For example, the Japanese used Amis to build infrastructure in Taiwan because it was less costly than recruiting Japanese. Due to poor conditions and slavery, Amis began to resist and held a few protests; however, it would result in tragic genocides, like “Cikasuan Incident” (CIP). Over time, with the lifting of martial law and new economic opportunities, more people from Amis group migrated to the east coastal area.

Speaking of Amis society, they have a matrilineal kinship system. Therefore, family affairs, such as inheritance, property, and others, are determined by the mother’s line (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 33). Traditionally, any man who wanted to get married to an Amis woman had to work at his future wife’s house for weeks or even months without any payment to show his dedication (CIP). If Amis woman wanted, she could divorce her husband at any time. Women were also in charge of rice (or millet) fields, while men took care of hunting (Blundell 2006, 44). However, this matrilineal system faced jeopardy because of newcomers. Both Japanese and Chinese had a very strong patrilineal system, where the man was the head of the family. Because of the interaction with them, Amis gradually adapted to the patriarchy, and since then family property has been inherited from father to son; and tribes would elect male chief leaders instead of females.

Although the kinship system has shifted, the traditional values remain. For example, the millet cultivation. In Amis culture, all rituals were organized and held depending on the cycle of millet – the sowing, growing, harvesting, and conservation of it (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 121). In Amis, millet is referred to as *hafay*, and is regarded as a spiritual entity endowed with ears and eyes. Just as the millet has the cycle of growing until it is ready for harvest, so do the people’s lives (from birth to death). Having a symbolic meaning, millet was regarded as the most precious crop, even after rice took over its place once the colonizers changed millet plantations into rice plantations.

The rules for growing millet were strict. Each member of Amis tribe had to follow strict regulations. For example, during certain steps of growing millet, members were prohibited from taking a shower, eating seafood, or even drinking or touching water. Because the Amis tribe was previously a fully matriarchal society, millet was associated with womanhood and thus greatly respected (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 122). Meanwhile, manhood was associated with hunting and fishing.

Amis have three main ceremonies that are directly connected to their traditional industries: agriculture and fishing. Those ceremonies include the Harvest Festival (*ilisin*), Ocean Ceremony (*misacepo*), and Finishing Ceremony (*pakelang*). The most important and well-known of these three is the Harvest Festival. It is held each year between June and August for three to seven days after the millet is harvested. The origin of *ilisin* came from the tradition of thanking the gods for a generous harvest, as well as asking for an abundant harvest next year (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 48). During the Harvest Festival, tribal members would celebrate by dancing, singing, playing games, and performing rituals. An important step during the Harvest Festival is to drink millet wine, due to its religious

meaning (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 122). However, since millet was replaced by rice, Amis adjusted some customs, as well as dates for performing the Harvest Festival to align more with rice-growing cycle.

The other two ceremonies, *misacepo* and *pakelang*, are related to the ocean and fishing. The *misacepo* is celebrated in June near the ocean, where prayers and offerings are made to the deity of the sea (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 48). Tribe's elderly have to make offerings to the ocean by noon and then throw them in the sea by asking the god to protect them from the waves and to give them more fish. The following task is to go to the ocean and catch fish, which will be distributed later according to the age of each member, to show respect for the elderly (CIP). *Pakelang* ceremony also includes prayers, and it represents the beginning and end of all the ceremonies (Yeh 2021, 49). Amis people hold these ceremonies even in contemporary times, with some of them experiencing high interest from tourists (especially the Harvest Festival). It is a way for Amis people to celebrate and preserve their own culture, even if the majority of them reside in urban areas.

Apart from the Harvest Festival, Amis are also known for their music. Because of their size, the music of the Amis also had an impact on the music of other indigenous communities. The music flows into every aspect of Amis life: during work, leisure times, ceremonies, birth, death, etc. While in Chinese culture it is common to offer food for deities, in Amis tradition members would also offer singing and dancing as a way to present their offering (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 50). Throughout different periods in Taiwan's history, the songs sung by Amis changed as well. As previously Amis would work mainly in agriculture and fishing sectors, now it has changed to labor industries, such as construction, industrialization, manufacturing, and textile sites (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 51). Therefore, traditional songs that were performed for agriculture (weeding, plowing, and planting), as well as for head-hunting triumphs, were replaced to align more with modern lifestyle, usually covering themes of homesickness and the challenges of strenuous labor (Chiang, and Kim 2003, 52).

3.2 Cultural Characteristics: Bunun Group

Bunun tribe is one of the 16 officially recognized indigenous groups in Taiwan. It is the 4th biggest indigenous group, consisting of approximately 59,536 individuals (2020 statistics, CIP). Historically, this group was distributed on both sides of the Central Mountain Range, making Bunun tribe live on one of the highest elevations among all indigenous people (Ong 2022, 40). Because of that, they identify themselves as highland people, living above any other tribe. In fact, over half of the Bunun population resides at elevations exceeding 1,000 meters. However, due to high migrations, Bunun people can now be found all around Taiwan: the Central Mountain Range, Hualien, Taitung, and Kaohsiung.

Traditionally, Bunun people lived in small entities. Residing high in the mountains, they would relocate their homes based on headhunting and agricultural traditions (the practice of slash-and-burn agriculture). By doing so, their territories would expand across vast regions in mountainous areas. When competing with other tribes, Bunun people showed great fighting skills and were therefore known as great warriors and headhunters.

Because they occupied such high elevations, during the Qing and Japanese colonial periods, they had very limited interaction with the settlers. In fact, Bunun people were one of the last groups to be marginalized by the Japanese. As a result, now Bunun have the largest number of festivals and ceremonies alive (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 124). However, because during the Japanese colonial period Bunun people showed their disapproval by revolting and setting rebellions, therefore the Japanese implemented a mass relocation policy so it would be easier to monitor Bunun people (CIP). Headhunting was forbidden, and slash-and-burn agriculture lost its effect, as Bunun were confined to their designated territory. At lower elevations, Bunun people started to interact more with other tribes, as well as with Japanese, and later Han Taiwanese.

Different from Amis, Bunun tribe always had a patrilineal social system (Ong 2022, 40). Therefore, the succession of the household was transmitted from male to male. However, in general, Bunun people advocated for an egalitarian society, where everyone has equal rights and is treated the same way. Any form of hierarchy was highly minimized, unless necessary, for example, to determine leaders (same, 40). There were three types of leadership: political leader (in charge of headhunting and warfare), leader of Ear Shooting ritual (most often the best hunter was appointed), and priest of agricultural rituals (in charge of observing nature and maintaining peace) (same, 40).

Bunun people used to live in small group within the same family. A few Bunun families would form one clan, and as members of that clan, they could share the same hunting grounds and agricultural lands (Yang 2001, 31). Except from sharing common areas, clan members would also perform annual rituals, usually in a special house called *lumah*, which was considered to be the most important social unit of Bunun's daily life (Yang 2001, 30). The clan system experienced changes once the Japanese relocated Bunun people to lower elevations. Starting from the 20th century, Bunun clans had to live close to each other, forming a different cross-clan atmosphere, where a shared maintenance was implemented between different clans (CIP).

Since Bunun people used to reside at high elevations surrounded by mountains and nature, they followed the practice of animism. For them, different natural objects and creatures possessed a unique spiritual essence. For example, the sky was believed to have a divine power to influence the lunar cycles, through which Bunun people would adapt their hunting, harvesting, and other ceremonies (Ong 2022, 40). In fact, all the ceremonies and rituals performed were based on the lunar calendar and the growth of millet. This calendar was by far the most complicated among all other

indigenous tribes (Yang 2001, 127). Some ceremonies took over a hundred days, sometimes interchanging with other ceremonies. As a result, Bunun tribe was the only one to develop the practice of recording those annual cycles in written form (Ong 2022, 40).

Based on Bunun lunar calendar, each year welcomed plenty of different ceremonies, including *Mapulaho* (start of millet season), *Igbinagan* (start of seed planting), *Inholawan* (field's weeding), *Syolaan* (millet harvesting), *Andagaan* (storing millet), *Malahtangia* (harvest and hunting celebration), and more (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 124). While some of these ceremonies became extinct due to colonization and millet replacement with rice, *Malahtangia* still remains a significant ceremony in Bunun's life.

Malahtangia is also known as Ear Shooting ritual, the most important and well-kept ceremony in Bunun culture. During the ceremony, Bunun people offer prayers for successful hunting and good harvest (CIP). As a part of the tradition, tribe members had to shoot the ear of the deer or roe, hence this ceremony was called Ear Shooting ritual (Yang 2001, 127). *Malahtangia* rituals were performed by men, since women were prohibited from taking part in any hunting activities. The tribe's leader would call everyone early in the morning (around 3 - 4 am), and the ritual would begin with the gunshot (CIP). Next, healthy Bunun men would join the hunt and catch wild animals, which they would display for offerings later at the end of the ceremony. This ritual was also a competition between men, who would compete with each other about who could catch a bigger prey. Lastly, to conclude the ceremony, Bunun people had to sing *Pasibutbut* song, which now became their signature song (Ong 2022, 40).

The most distinguishing part of Bunun culture is the number of their ceremonies, and also their music. As stated previously, their signature song is called *Pasibutbut*, which even got international recognition for its beauty and complexity. Already during the Japanese colonial period, in 1952, a Japanese ethnomusicologist found this captivating melody and sent its recording to UNESCO, to show the sophisticated polyphonic structure of this tribal song (CIP). The title of this song indicates two parts: *pasi* meaning "harmonious sharing", and *butbut* meaning "mutual support" (Ong 2022, 41). To perform this song, male members of Bunun tribe form a circle by linking their arms. Then, starting gradually, the melody is built as each member joins the formation of the song. The whole performance is wordless and imitates the humming of honey bees (Yang 2001, 143). The idea is to create a harmonious, smooth sound, and to become one with nature. As an elderly Bunun member states: "Our ancestral gods learned these from the bees singing inside a hollow hole of a tree on the mountain. This chorus does not have any particular norm; notwithstanding, they improvise in accordance with the leader's intonation, resulting in an admirable chorus" (Ong 2022, 42). Therefore, in Bunun culture, music helps to feel the divine power of nature. It is to imitate different natural sounds, to become a part of them.

3.3 Cultural Characteristics: Yami Group

Yami is one of the 16 officially recognized Taiwanese indigenous groups. Their population consists of 4,684 individuals, one of the smallest numbers among all groups (2020 statistics, CIP). Unlike other indigenous groups in Taiwan, Yami people do not inhabit the mainland part of Taiwan; instead, they occupy the Orchid Island. Therefore, their culture is quite distinctive from the rest of the tribes. It is important to mention that Yami people call themselves Tao, from the saying “*ponso no tao*” (“island of human beings”) (Chang, and Chung 2022, 103). They oppose being called Yami, although it has been their official name given by the Japanese since 1897. For centuries, they have tried to change their Yami title, and only recently has the CIP approved the Tao version.

Compared to other Taiwanese indigenous groups, Yami people arrived to Taiwan quite recently, around 600 – 800 years ago (Chen 2017, 77). There is no doubt that they are Austronesians, just like the rest of the Taiwanese indigenous groups, yet their settlement on the Orchid Island is unclear. According to Yami beliefs, their ancestors inhabited the Orchid Island after migrating from the Batanes in the northern Philippines (CIP). Although they have adopted new traditions, different from those of their ancestors, however, their language is regarded as being closer to the Ivatan language branch, indicating their connections with Batanes (Huang et al. 2021, 93).

Being surrounded by 45 square kilometers, the Orchid Island has six Yami villages, each with its own language dialect and traditions (Lin 2016, 89). Each clan is called *zipus*, while tribe is referred to as *ili*. In Yami culture, the society does not have a hierarchical system, although elders are believed to have more experience and expertise (CIP). In general, Yami people help to take care of each other by sharing the workload, looking after children, and more. No other Taiwanese indigenous group is as co-working as Yami.

The phenomenon of Yami’s coherent co-existence can be explained by their primary habits. Surrounded by water, Yami people survive on fishing and agriculture. Their lives depend primarily on the fish that they catch and the food that they grow. For instance, taros and sweet potatoes are the most consumed crops, while fish is the source of protein and all the nutrients (Lin 2016, 89). While men are in charge of fishing, women work in agriculture. Both fishing and agriculture require collaborative effort, thus having good relationships between *zipus* and *ili* members is the key to a successful livelihood. Hence, Yami people have to learn how to work in teams in order to increase their food and to protect themselves from any possible risk (it applies more in the fishing sector).

Yami people are good sailors, and as already discussed, their primary activity is fishing. Therefore, fishing is Yami’s distinctive feature, which is regarded as sacred in their culture. Many traditional Yami ceremonies and legends involve the sea and fishing. For example, the most sacred fish for Yami people is the flying fish (Chang, and Chung 2022, 105). Yami people believe that each

year between March and June, waves bring flying fish near the coastal areas of the Orchid Island, meanwhile attracting bigger food sources, such as tuna and dolphinfish (Lin 2016, 90). Therefore, flying fish is regarded as a gift from the gods, and one must catch it with the utmost respect.

In order to access the fishing grounds, Yami people used to construct sustainable boats, which are a distinctive feature of their culture. While smaller boats were called *tatala* and were meant for only 1 – 3 people to sail, *cinedkeran* could easily carry 6 -10 members (CIP). Together, family members would construct those boats meticulously, following strict regulations. By using wooden planks, they would make a boat shape first, and then they would carve traditional patterns on it and paint in white, red, and black colors (Chang, and Chung 2022, 106). All of this required great teamwork, and helped to establish strong ties within Yami people. Moreover, the traditional Yami boat represents spiritual power. Hence, once a Yami boy was born, his parents would put a tree seed in the soil, wishing for their grown-up child to use the wood from that tree to build its own boat.

Yami's religion consists of three particles: deity, spirits (ghosts), and people. While the deity helps Yami people and brings luck, ghosts must be avoided at all costs, since they bring bad luck and illnesses (CIP). To follow this concept, Yami people have created *Makaniaw*, which is explained as: “all behaviors that anger the gods and lead to punishment and disaster” (Lin 2016, 90). Hence, every member has to follow certain rules to maintain the divine balance. For example, it is forbidden to catch flying fish from February to March. Also, flying fish itself is divided into *rahet* (male fish) and *oyod* (female fish). While *oyod* can be consumed by both males and females, *rahet* can be eaten only by males (Chang, and Chung 2022, 10). Therefore, *Makaniaw* is included in all Yami social customs, and each member has to follow those rules.

To celebrate the harvest and to hope for abundant fish yields, Yami people hold numerous ceremonies. Those ceremonies include *Meywanva* (calling fish ritual), *Mamoka* (flying fish storage ritual), *Manoyotoyon* (flying fish cleanup ritual), and *Meypiyavean* (harvest festival) (CIP). Those names indicate the purpose of each ceremony: *Meywanva* is used to pray for an abundant catch (from February to March); *Mamoka* is celebrated at the end of the flying fish season, when all the fish has to be cleaned and stored for the rest of the year; *Manoyotoyon* is held in the autumn, around Mid-Autumn festival, when Yami members reunite and finish the dried fish; and *Meypiyavean* is held at the end of the fishing season, when everyone celebrates by filling their stomachs with food from harvest and fishing.

Since Yami people reside on the Orchid Island, therefore, throughout history they have had limited interaction with other tribes, as well as Han Taiwanese. As an example, of all the indigenous groups in Taiwan, only Yami has never performed the head-hunting ritual. They were also “spared” by Japanese, as Orchid Island was excluded from their interest and was turned into a biological and anthropological research area (Chang, and Chung 2022, 104). For this reason, Yami people did not

experience harsh assimilation procedures like the rest of indigenous communities. However, once the KMT took over Taiwan, the Orchid Island became home to prisoners, as the government would send convicted felons there (same, 104). Such action created Yami's resentment towards a new government, which gradually grew even stronger once the KMT decided to pour waste on the Orchid Island.

The issues between Yami people and the "outsiders" started from the 1950s, when Taiwanese government decided to modernize indigenous peoples' communities. Firstly, the KMT government decided to chop down the majority of trees in the Orchid Island, since they possessed no economic value. Meanwhile, for Yami people and the Orchid Island itself, those trees were an essential part of ecosystems. Then, starting 1967, Orchid Island was opened for tourists, forcing Yami people to share their native territories with others.

However, probably the biggest problem was the nuclear waste storage in the Orchid Island from the mid 1980s (Huang et al. 2021, 227). The government deceived Yami people by falsely claiming to build a fish can factory, while in reality, they disposed of tons of nuclear waste on the island (Lin 2016, 92). Once the truth came out, Yami people felt completely deceived by the government. Cancer rates have risen over the years. Therefore, Yami people started protesting and did that for more than 30 years, however, this issue has not yet been solved. President Tsai Ing-wen acknowledged past mistakes and apologized in 2016, but nuclear waste continues to poison Orchid Island and its people, despite efforts by the DPP to address the issue.

3.4 Comparative Analysis: Amis, Bunun, Yami Groups

Last three chapters introduced each of the tribe (Amis, Bunun, Yami) individually, disclosing cultural aspects and main festivals, as well as hardships that each group had to undergo. This chapter will go further into details and provide a comparative analysis of these three groups, and how they manage to revive their culture in the 21st century.

Firstly, the geographical location of an individual's dwelling can profoundly impact the historical narrative and bring changes to one's cultural heritage. To all three groups – Amis, Bunun, and Yami – this rule applies as well. The first difference between these tribes is their location. Amis are located in the eastern part of Taiwan, mostly covering Hualien and Taitung cities. Bunun, on the other hand, traditionally inhabited some of the highest elevations, thus are categorized as Highland indigenous people. Due to their geographical location, Bunun people were one of the last to be influenced by newcomers. Therefore, they managed to secure most of their traditions. Yet, many Bunun people are now attracted by big cities that offer better salaries. As a result, many have left their rural hometowns in central Taiwan. Currently, various Bunun groups reside all around Taiwan, and

not only one side of it, as seen in Amis example. Lastly, Yami tribe is the only group residing in the Orchid Island, far away from the rest of indigenous communities in Taiwan. They could be classified as a Highland indigenous group, although they are often simply identified as the Orchid Island's inhabitants. Yami people did not experience much of Japanese assimilation. However, once the Japanese colonial period ended and the KMT took over the government, Yami people were the ones who suffered a lot – starting with their chopped trees, turning the island into a prison, and ending with nuclear waste storage.

These three groups have different variations regarding their ancestral origin. Amis have two legends that explain the origin of their existence – northern Amis believe they are the descendants of deities, while southern Amis believe they emerged from the stone. In the stone legend, humanity was once almost extinct, when a huge flood took many people's lives. Only a brother named Dalakadakang and sister Youkasuoku survived. They could not find other human beings, so left alone, they decided to produce children in order to save human existence. Youkasuoku got pregnant, yet she gave birth to the stone. Both Dalakadakang and Youkasuoku wanted to throw the rock away but the Moon confronted them and said they should keep it. Soon, Dalakadakang died and Youkasuoku was left alone with the stone. She took good care of the stone, which grew each day. A few days later, four little children came out of it, who are now considered to be Amis ancestors. In Amis culture, they believe in spirits and practice animism, just like the rest of indigenous tribes. Spirits are called *kawas*, and are distributed in heaven and earth *kawas* (CIP).

It is different from Bunun and Yami people. Yami distribute spirits by good and bad, good being deities who bring luck and good health, while bad spirits are ghosts who cause bad harvest and illnesses. Meanwhile, Bunun people call spirits *hanitu*. *Hanitu* includes everything – animals, plants, souls, and each part has its own divine power. Humans have *hanitu* as well, yet one resides on the left shoulder (bad), and another on the right (good) shoulder. Which *hanitu* is stronger, will determine the person's life and future. Bunun people, differently from Amis, believe they emerged from a calabash (although other variations also contain stone). In Bunun legend, one day a calabash fell from the sky and broke into small gourds, from which little human beings emerged. Yami have quite a similar legend but they use a stone metaphor. They believe a huge stone fell into the water, dividing the stone into two pieces. A god named Nemotacolulito walked from one of the halves, and he shook a bamboo that was in front of him. Later, the bamboo divided into two parts and a human being came out of it. So, as one can see, each indigenous group holds its own belief about how their ancestors came into existence. The table below will further provide key differences in Amis, Bunun, and Yami groups.

	Amis	Bunun	Yami
Population	213,514	59,536	4,684
Location	Hualien, Taitung	Central Mountain Range	Orchid Island
Lowland/Highland	Lowland - urban	Highland	Highland - island
Societal system	Matrialinear	Patrilineal	Patrilineal
Industry	Agriculture, fishing, labor	Agriculture, hunting	Fishing, agriculture
Notable ceremonies	Harvest Festival	Malahtangia	Flying Fish Festival
Food	Millet, rice, fish, meat, betel nut	Millet, rice, corn, sweet potato, meat	Fish, taro, sweet potato, seafood
Colors (clothes)	Sharp in color; usually red, black, white, blue, and green	Mainly white with red, blue, black, green, yellow elements	Plain colors; during rituals white and blue
Hierarchy	Exists; based on gender and age	Egalitarian society, yet with a few leadership figures	Yami-style equality; no direct leaders but elders have greater authority
Biggest issues	Identity crisis	Settling to bigger cities and leaving hometown; identity crisis	Nuclear waste

Based on the table above, one can see the unique characteristics that each indigenous group possesses, regardless of whether they belong to the same Austronesian group. Apart from those differences, identity crisis and feeling inferior (and hopeless, like in Yami situation) in Han-based Taiwanese society are shared among all those indigenous groups.

In pursuit of cultural revitalization, each group devises distinct strategies to resurface their cultural heritage. This paper already discussed some of those methods, such as museums, art / cultural centers, tourism, festivals, and so on. For Yami people, their geographical location allows them to receive thousands of tourists each year. Many locals and foreigners alike consider Orchid Island one of Taiwan's most stunning islands. Consequently, by exploring this naturally beautiful destination, visitors can experience the authentic way of life of the Yami people. Therefore, tourism is Yami's main option for promoting their cultural heritage, as well as fighting for justice (referring to the nuclear waste problem).

Meanwhile, Bunun people have developed various cultural revitalization plans. For example, in 1992 a Bunun elder established the first educational facility, meant for only Bunun people, where preschool children got to learn their traditional language and culture (Huang 2016, 306). Once it got popular, the school expanded and now it has become the Bunun Cultural and Educational Foundation. With its vast territory, the area covers a school and other facilities that

promote Bunun traditions and language. Another important aspect of Bunun cultural preservation efforts is the search for its traditional roots. Interestingly, Bunun is the first Taiwanese indigenous group that initiated the root-searching expeditions in 1998 (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 208). As stated previously, Bunun used to live in remote, high-elevation areas, however, due to Japanese policies they were forced to relocate to lower areas. Hence, this root-searching expedition is meant to help Bunun reconnect with their ancestral past, as well as reclaim their land rights (a significant issue to all indigenous communities across Taiwan). With these expeditions, Bunun people managed to find their original land called Laipunuk, which is an important cultural heritage (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 215). Laipunuk is considered to be Bunun's ancestral home, so it holds significant value. Bunun people dearly wish they could return to their ancestral way of living. Therefore, they started campaigns to revive millet plantations, build traditional stone slab houses, and perform traditional rituals, like *Malahtangia* (Shih, and Tsai 2021, 217). Also, since the late 20th century the government has allowed hunting to be brought back (although there are restrictions on using weapons), so Bunun people could embrace their cultural heritage and preserve their lost traditions.

Amis group is the biggest indigenous group in Taiwan. Naturally, one could think it should be the easiest for them to preserve their cultural heritage. However, due to assimilation processes during the colonial times and Amis settlement in urban areas, it put their cultural identity in danger. To revive a cultural notion, Amis has established various cultural centers, museums, expanded tourism, and more. They also perform Harvest Festival, which is the biggest ceremony in Amis culture that can reunite all the members together. Since 2001, Taipei has established so called language nests (母語巢 *muyu chao*), which recruited native indigenous people from 10 officially recognized groups (Amis included) and taught children their native language (Huang et al. 2021, 136). There are also other schools all across urban cities that are established for Amis youth. One example is Dong Hwa University in Hualien, which recently added Amis studies to its curriculum (Huang et al. 2021, 138). Just like Bunun, Amis have a rich tradition of performing songs. Their songs have a strong rhythmic drive, therefore singing is usually combined with dancing moves: clapping, foot-stomping, and dancing (Ong 2022, 8). These performances gain a lot of attention from others, and it is common that during New Year and other major celebrations, Amis and Bunun people perform on the stage.

In conclusion, all three groups in Taiwan navigate their distinct paths towards cultural revitalization, drawing upon its unique heritage and confronting contemporary challenges with resilience and determination. They understand that the only way how to preserve their culture from fading away is by embracing it and staying strong together.

CONCLUSIONS

After a thorough investigation, this paper can conclude that the colonialism in Taiwan has negatively impacted Taiwanese indigenous lives and put their cultural heritage in danger. Indigenous people experienced the harsh reality of being marginalized, assimilated into different political regimes – the Dutch merchants, Qing Dynasty, Japanese, and Chinese (the KMT). After experiencing discrimination and inequality in all social sectors, in the late 1990s, the indigenous communities could finally start to embrace their culture and together with the government's support, work on cultural revitalization. These are the main findings, correlating with the objectives outlined at the beginning of this paper:

1. Throughout Taiwan's colonial history, indigenous people faced marginalization and assimilation. Under Japanese rule, they were segregated, and exploited as cheap labor. During the KMT rule until 1987, the situation has not changed much. Only in the 1990s did Taiwan see identity shifts, enabling indigenous cultural revival. In the 21st century, under the DPP, indigenous peoples gained rights and support to preserve and embrace their culture.
2. Indigenous people usually suffer from poverty due to low socio-economic conditions. It leads to various common issues, such as developing alcoholism, health problems, and the overall lower life expectancy compared to the Han Taiwanese. These issues are more evident in rural indigenous communities with limited economic opportunities. It is also common for indigenous youth not to pursue higher academic studies, even if the government provides extra points during college entrance exam and other benefits.
3. Each indigenous group possesses different cultural characteristics. For instance, Amis are more urban and have a matrilineal system together with a clear hierarchy. On the other hand, the Bunun and Yami are patrilineal, promoting subtle hierarchy and equality. The Bunun have the most ceremonies and focus in hunting and agriculture, while the Amis engage in both agriculture and fishing, and the Yami primarily focus on fishing with some agriculture.
4. The main cultural preservation strategies lie in museums, cultural centers, art exhibitions, tourism, and ceremonies. The Amis and Bunun emphasize music and songs for their important ceremonies and rituals; meanwhile Yami people attract tourists by displaying their lifestyle in the Orchid Island, as well as unique traditional boats.

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¹³ 20160801 總統代表政府向原住民族道歉 (*Zongtong daibiao zhengfu xiang yuanzhu minzu daoqian*). Translation: The President apologizes to the indigenous peoples on behalf of the government.

¹⁴ 教育部, 原住民族教育法 (*Jiaoyubu, Yuanzhuminzu Jiaoyu Fa*). Translation: Ministry of Education, Indigenous Peoples Education Act.

¹⁵ 文化部, 文化資產保存法 (*Wenhuabu, wenhua zichan baocun fa*). Translation: Ministry of Culture, Cultural Heritage Preservation Act.

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Efforts of Cultural Preservation by Indigenous Communities in Taiwan: A Case Study of Amis, Bunun and Yami Groups

SUMMARY

This paper focuses on indigenous communities in Taiwan and their cultural revitalization strategies from the 20th century. It provides a historical context and an overview of the indigenous situation in Taiwan to illustrate their struggles and emphasize the significance of cultural revitalization.

Therefore, objectives chosen for this paper include examining Taiwan's historical colonization period from the 20th century to present-day governmental policies, categorizing indigenous peoples into Mountain (highland) and Plain (lowland) groups, and exploring the unique cultural characteristics of the Amis, Bunun, and Yami communities.

After a thorough research, it is possible to come to the conclusion that indigenous people's situation has changed drastically, yet in recent decades it has shown positive outcomes of them finally being able to embrace their cultural identity and promote cultural heritage through various strategies: tourism, cultural centers, festival performances, and more. It comes together with the shifting local mindset of Taiwan. As once being regarded as a temporary location, now to the majority of Han Taiwanese it became a permanent home. Therefore, indigenous people are usually active during the political and social discussions aimed for building Taiwanization. Once being marginalized, indigenous society can finally work on rebuilding their cultural heritage. Yet, long-term assimilation policies left side effects, such as high mortality rates and lack of motivation within indigenous communities. Thus, governmental and societal support is crucial for effectively revitalizing indigenous cultures.

With the findings and researches done, this paper could be useful for anyone interested in Taiwanese history and indigenous societies.